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## A GLIMPSE OF THE INNER LIFE OF CHRIST'S TIME

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OF that small group of common folk awaiting our Lord's advent, into whose inner life the Scripture vouchsafes us a glimpse, one of the most interesting is Nathanael of Cana. To the attentive discerner of spirits the Savior's first greeting of that ardent enthusiast contains implications of great interest as an evidence of the existence of a peculiar group of idealists to which he must have belonged.

With what we must believe to be an unerring divine insight, Nathanael was styled by Jesus "an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile." We cannot but feel that the form of falsity or guile from which our Lord so admiringly pronounces him free is something higher than the mere vulgar dishonesty in dealing, or falsehood in common intercourse, which is the temptation of cowardly or avaricious natures. It must be a far subtler and more spiritual besetment. The absence of it is distinctly a virtue—something of positive worth, involving not simply heroic resistance in the realm of the actual, but insight and humility and direct converse with truth in the realm of the ideal. He was a sincere man—a man without sham. He saw and exemplified truth without being a party to what Paul would call its adulteration. Perhaps we may get nearest to the force of the Master's commendation by translating, "Behold an Israelite indeed; in whom is no cant."

Now, cant is a totally unconscious hypocrisy. It is the grasping of spiritual things solely by their notions, and a use of those notions as social currency in a conventional manner, and without experience of their content, as if they were the realities. It is the use of the deepest terms without an attempt to fathom their meaning—the assumption of proficiency or knowledge in

realms to which, except by mere intellectual cram, the spirit has not attained.

The province in which cant especially operates is the sphere of the ideal. It is only those conceptions or systems of conduct which attain their true existence and worth by being brought to an ideal perfection that are capable of being debased by cant. Cant is but the shadow, or counterfeit, of the spiritual; it is the characteristic failure or foil which is the correlative of idealism. No one falls into cant except in the presence of an ideal too high and pure for the unspiritual to comprehend. To commend Nathanael, therefore, for preserving himself free from cant was to imply that he was an idealist. That he was longing for a perfection—seeking a higher than earthly reward—appears in the very terms of our Savior's compliment, in which he emphasizes the particular virtue of being without guile.

But the emphasis on this particular virtue also seems to imply another thing—that Nathanael in this regard shines by contrast. If Jesus is gratified to find for once a genuine Israelite without cant, then it appears that there were far too many others in whom this profession of true Israelite had degenerated into a cant. But cant dogs the footsteps only of those ideals which have become the watchword of a group or sect. It is only the virtue that has attained to a certain spread of popularity which attracts a body of imitators; only a form of enthusiasm which has developed and fixed and limited its notions into a rote-learned confession experiences the fate of having its aspirations taken up and vulgarized by those who are capable only of cant. Nathanael's emphasized and contrasted sincerity in this idealistic sphere, therefore, discloses by the light of its mild ray the existence of a recognized group with aspirations or pretensions similar to his own.

We see, then, that among those people in whom the prophetic ideas had ripened into a preparation for Christ was a distinct group to whom the being a true Israelite was an ideal attainment. Among the professions and aspirations which constituted the motive power of spiritual religion was this impulse and purpose to merit the name of an Israelite indeed. Not all

of Israel, then, rested in the feeling that because they had Abraham for their father they had realized the whole meaning of their birthright; there were those who distinguished between Israel after the flesh and Israel after the spirit, and longed to realize the inner meaning of their Abrahamic lineage by confirmed character.

Idealism does not always take the form of a longing for enhanced personal worth and goodness. Much oftener, I fancy, the person who sighs for better things takes the satisfactoriness of his own virtue for granted, while the longing is for better conditions for its exercise. Few strive to be ideal Israelites, as compared with the many who wish Israelites to have an ideal chance. So in that group who waited for redemption in Israel there appears little mention of that particular form of idealism which Nathanael exemplified. Zacharias is a good churchman whose prayer is that the nation may serve God all its days without the fear of enemies; while the Messiah is like a sunrise enlightening the darkened, so that their feet may go straight in the paths of peace. Simeon awaits the consolation of Israel; and the Messiah is to him a light for the gentiles and the glory of his own nation. But are not these anticipations of redemption, good as they are, distinctly less personal and character-forming than the humble and unsatisfied longing to merit and adorn the grand old name of Israelite, which characterized the idealism of Nathanael's kind? These others wish for a *benefit* to arise from the coming messianic state; he longs for a *righteousness* to be realized personally in it, and in so doing illustrates that superior character-developing power which comes of welcoming Christ *in* us, as distinguished from the Christ *for* us.

In this little messianic cult in which Nathanael shared we seem to see a suggestive connection with the Servant-of-Yahweh prophecy included in the book of Isaiah. It would be strange if that most inward and spiritual expression of the messianic hope did not have its unperverted outgrowth somewhere in the inner life of our Savior's time, though naturally the messianic expectations which come to most noticeable expression in Jewish popular life are the more ambitious hopes connected with

Messiah's royalty and power. In the climax of that prophecy, as we find it in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, the Servant appears as a wonderful individual, greatly afflicted, and yet finally felt by the penitent to be God's sufferer for their sins, and destined to be satisfied by the redemption of many through his sufferings. No one, perhaps, in Christ's time, except the Savior himself, ever thought of identifying himself with the Servant as there portrayed, or aspired to realize personally that character in its highest and most redemptive aspect. All that the most spiritual could anticipate in that presentation would be Christ *for* us.

But it is to be remembered that when the Servant of Yahweh first appears in the prophecy he is identified with the captive nation. He is a new character which they are to realize in spite of the sweeping away of their national existence. Then, later, as the inability of the nation as a whole to make the vision actual becomes apparent, the Servant seems to be thought of as the ideal center of the nation—the spiritual heart of Israel which, by its comprehension of God's redemptive purposes, can be the vital *point d'appui* for the uplift of the nation itself, as well as for the redemption of the world. Here was a conception of the Servant of Yahweh into which the spiritually minded could enter by personal aspiration. Here was a glowing vision of the messianic character which could identify itself with the purest human longings and become the goal of those who humbly sought to fulfil the meaning of their birthright as members of the priestly nation.

Is there not reason to surmise that in that idealistic trait of Nathanael which Christ commended, and in which he recognized spiritual kinship, there is seen an outgrowth of that prophetic thought of Messiah which conceives of him as a goal of collective attainment? May we not believe that the prophet's presentation of the Servant as the true spiritual Israel did not prove abortive, but found an answering aspiration in some hearts? But few glimpses are given us of the deepest inner life of Israel in the time of Christ; but, if we have rightly interpreted this one, what a gratifying glimpse it is! There were those who

sought not simply to benefit by God's chosen One when he came, but who frankly aimed to *be* the Servant of Yahweh, at least in some aspects of his ideal elevation above common Israel. In their reception of the Messiah there was the transforming power of the Christ *in* us, as well as the hope of remission through the Christ *for* us. Even in this highest character of redeeming Servant of Yahweh, we may believe that Jesus was not projected on the nation as one of totally foreign birth and with no possibility of fellowship, but that he came as the highest, truest fruitage of their ages of religion and revelation—the only perfect ripening of that fruit indeed, but at least accompanied by other growths on the same stem not different in kind from the seed which finally came to its perfect fruition in the Word made flesh.